

Environmental crime is one of the **IMPACT** priorities, Europol's priority crime areas, under the 2018–2021 EU Policy Cycle.

Environmental crime covers the gamut of activities that breach environmental legislation and cause significant harm or risk to the environment, human health, or both.

These offences can include, but are not limited to the

- › improper collection, transport, recovery or disposal of waste;
- › illegal operation of a plant in which a dangerous activity is carried out or in which dangerous substances or preparations are stored;
- › killing, destruction, possession or trade of protected [wild animal](#) or [plant species](#);
- › production, importation, exportation, marketing or use of ozone-depleting substances.

Waste trafficking demonstrates the extent of the problem. The use of legal business structures by criminal actors are an inherent feature of this crime area. In many cases, criminal actors and legal businesses are indistinguishable. As part of this development, criminals involved in waste trafficking have moved towards the more complex business model of illicit waste management rather than simply illegally dumping waste.

Waste traffickers now operate along the entire waste-processing chain and rely heavily on the use of [fraudulent documents](#).

IMPACT

Environmental crime is characterised by its impact on the natural environment. This impact manifests itself in

- › increasing levels of pollution
- › a degradation of wildlife
- › a reduction in biodiversity
- › the disturbance of ecological balance.

Environmental crimes are not victimless. The damage they cause to ecosystems and the environment poses

- › the risk of disease
- › environmental disaster
- › irreversible climate change
- › the contamination of the food chain
- › reduced life expectancy
- › the death of human beings.

Environmental crime is highly lucrative – it can be as profitable as [illegal drug trafficking](#) – but the sanctions are much lower, and it is harder to detect. These factors make it highly attractive for organised crime groups.

Involvement in the illegal trafficking of waste and in endangered species of [animals](#) and [plants](#) is now routine for many organised crime groups. And there are indications that proceeds from these activities are also used to [finance terrorism](#) [↗](#). In the case of organised environmental crime, it is not uncommon for traditional [Mafia-style gangs](#) to use the same *modi operandi* and the same routes they use for their other activities.

According to a 2011 study, 3 out of the 12 most financially rewarding transnational criminal activities are linked to environmental crime. These include the illicit trafficking in:

- › wildlife (estimated annual value: USD 7.8 to 10 billion);
- › timber (estimated annual value: USD 7 billion);
- › fish (estimated annual value: USD 4.2 to 9.5 billion).

Overall, the annual value of transnational environmental crime is estimated to be worth USD 70 to 213 billion annually.

RESPONSE

The cross-border aspect of crimes in this area underlines the need for a pan-European response by law enforcement. With dedicated staff working on environmental crime, Europol provides the permanent secretariat for the [Environmental Crime Network](#) (EnviCrimeNet), an informal network connecting police officers and other crime fighters in the field.

In 2015, the EnviCrimeNet and Europol finalised a year-long intelligence project on environmental crime. The project, which used data from 50 jurisdictions, found that, next to the usual problems of comparing EU crime statistics, the main issue with environmental crime is that much of it goes undetected due to the reticence or inefficiency of law enforcement agencies in dealing with this problem.

NUMBER OF ITEMS FOUND: 62

SEARCH



TYPE

Article/Story, Event, How-To Guide, Landing Page, Multimedia, News/Press Release, Operation, Page, Publication/Document

TARGET GROUP

Q SEARCH

⊗ CLEAR ALL



1 600 OFFENCES DETECTED IN A GLOBAL OPERATION AGAINST MARINE POLLUTION

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE



EUROPEAN UNION SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME THREAT ASSESSMENT

PUBLICATION/DOCUMENT



SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME IN THE EU: A CORRUPTING INFLUENCE

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE



€6 MILLION IN ILLEGAL PROFIT OF FRAUDULENT ORGANIC PISTACHIO SALES

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE





COVID-19 WASTE CRIME: EUROPE-WIDE OPERATION TO TACKLE UNLAWFUL SANITARY WASTE DISPOSAL

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE



355 PROTECTED REPTILES SAVED IN SPAIN IN HIT AGAINST WILDLIFE TRAFFICKERS

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE



28 BIRD TRAFFICKERS NETTING €1 MILLION PER YEAR ARRESTED IN SPAIN

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE



2 500 TONNES OF WASTE TRAFFICKED FROM THE CANARY ISLANDS TO AFRICA

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE



THE MOST RECENT FISHING SEASON SEES 108 SMUGGLERS ARRESTED AND OVER 2 TONNES OF GLASS EELS SEIZED IN EUROPE

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE



SPAIN AND PORTUGAL TAKE ILLEGAL IVORY OFF THE BLACK MARKET

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE



42 ARRESTED FOR TRAFFICKING STOLEN WASTE FROM SPAIN TO ASIA

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE



43 ARRESTED AFTER 27 POISONED BY CLAMS IN SPAIN

NEWS/PRESS RELEASE

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